

Health Behavior Determinants

High-Risk Sexual Behavior

Health Determinant: High-Risk Sexual Behavior

Health Behavior Component: Teen Birth Rate per 1000 (Fe 15-19 y/o)

Percent and Rank: 2007 – 27.6% (41)

2008 – 27.9% (45)

Healthiest Wisconsin Health Priority: High-Risk Sexual Behavior; Access to Primary and Preventive Health Services

Healthiest Wisconsin 2010 defines high-risk sexual behaviors as “sexual behaviors, including unprotected sex, that make someone more susceptible to infections or diseases, or that result in unintentional pregnancy”, (p. 60). The Teen Birth Rate is a measure of the average annual birth rate per 1000 females ages 15-19. This item is an important component of health behaviors because pregnant teens and teen mothers are at higher risk for acquiring sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), repeat pregnancy, and lower likelihood of completing school. Children born to teen mothers are more likely to be born with low birthweight and at higher risk of infanticide or child abuse.

Waupaca County has seen a very slight increase in the number of births to teens age 15-19, from 27.6/1000 (2007) to 27.9/1000 (2008). Though our rate changed almost imperceptibly, our rank went down to 45th from 41st. This means that other counties have seen significant strides while we have remained about the same. Our programs to combat teen pregnancy and high-risk sexual behaviors are stable and we are into a “second generation” of clients in our Healthy Connections Clinic. “Word of mouth” has been our best method of advertising and it appears to be the stimulus which has brought in the next wave of clients.

Begun in 1992, Healthy Connections, Waupaca County’s Reproductive Health Program, has provided access to primary and preventative services including, sexually-transmitted disease testing and treatment, HIV/AIDS testing and counseling as well as pregnancy testing and referral to appropriate supportive programs.

Aligning with Healthiest Wisconsin 2010 priorities, Waupaca County Health Services Division augmented services by meeting clients' contraceptive needs. Healthy Connections continues to address access to primary and preventative services and high-risk sexual behavior with an emphasis on dual-protection pregnancy and sexually-transmitted disease prevention. The mission of this family-planning program is to provide men and women of reproductive age access to affordable, quality reproductive health and contraceptive services. In past year, 411 unduplicated women of reproductive age received contraceptive services, and 100 unduplicated women of reproductive age received detection of pregnancy services and referral to appropriate economic, health and social programs including Badger Care Plus, Food Share, Prenatal Care Coordination, and WIC. 50 unduplicated male clients received reproductive health services including HIV/AIDS testing and counseling as well as STD testing, counseling and treatment as needed.

All women who come into the Healthy Connections Clinic are screened for eligibility for the Wisconsin Medicaid Family Planning Waiver Program which provides reimbursement to the clinic for all reproductive health care.

The Healthy Connections Clinic is staffed by support staff, public health nurses and one contract nurse practitioner and her medical assistant. Currently the clinic operates 17 hours a week in the Health Services Division of the Waupaca County Department of Health and Human Services.

Health Determinant: High-Risk Sexual Behavior

Health Behavior Component: Sexually Transmitted Diseases per 100,000

Number and Rank: 2007 - 125.6 (16)

2008 - 154.5 (23)

Healthiest Wisconsin 2010 Health Priority: High-Risk Sexual Behavior; Existing, Emerging and Re-Emerging Communicable Disease

Waupaca County, like many in our state, has seen a fairly dramatic increase in the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the last year. This increase dropped Waupaca County from the top to the upper middle quartile.

The Sexually Transmitted Disease component is a measure of the average annual number of reported cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, and genital herpes as the crude rate per 100,000 in the population and is not age adjusted. Tracking STDs is important because, if left untreated, many STDs can develop into more serious health issues. In addition, the prevalence of STDs is a proxy for high-risk sexual behavior. The top ten communicable diseases in Waupaca County in the past year included chlamydia trachomatis and genital herpes.

The Healthy Connections Clinic and Waupaca County public health nurses continue to make every effort to identify, test and treat clients, partners of clients and other contacts of clients with STDs. Education to prevent reinfection is an important deterrent to the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases. However, education will not be successful unless people are motivated to change and consistently practice risk-reduction behaviors. Some key factors have been identified which increase the likelihood of engaging in high-risk sexual behavior. These include: poverty, discrimination and substance use.

“Poverty contributes to poor health and reduced physical, psychological and cognitive functioning. These factors may contribute to high-risk sexual behaviors. Persons who are poor have higher rates of sexually-transmitted disease, including

HIV infection and unintended pregnancy. They frequently have limited access to health care services which results in undiagnosed medical conditions, such as sexually-transmitted disease, not completing recommended therapies, and lack of prenatal care because of limited financial resources or competing basic needs” (Healthiest Wisconsin 2010, p. 61).

The Family Planning Waiver Program (FPW) is an attempt, by the State of Wisconsin, to alleviate one barrier to needed care, but there are clients who attend Healthy Connections but do not qualify for FPW. They also often have jobs where they earn too little to be able to see other healthcare providers in the area. This is where the “sliding fee scale” of the Healthy Connections Clinic seeks to eliminate the financial barrier to care, at a second level, by providing clients with care they should be able to afford based on their income.

Substance use is also a risk behavior frequently associated with STDs and unintended pregnancies. When clients see Healthy Connections nurses, the medical history includes questions about substance use. Assurance of confidentiality finds many clients disclosing habits to the nurses related to their substance use and discussing intervention to change their behaviors.

Discrimination can be another issue influencing high-risk sexual behavior. Healthiest Wisconsin Health Priorities 2010 suggests that gay men, injection drug users, sex industry workers and members of racial and ethnic minority groups frequently face discrimination that may result in denial of risk, delayed access to services, and unfair treatment with regard to employment, housing and health/human services. As the population of Waupaca County continues to evolve, the Healthy Connections Clinic will continue to serve all clients who come in search of care.